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AUTHOR	Hahn, Joan M.
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ABSTRACT

Strategies for the development of comprehension during the beginning reading stages are discussed in this paper. Among the topics dealt with are relationships between developmental stages of speech production and reading comprehension; ways of creating a reading climate that promotes experiences with literature; specific techniques for using experiences with literature to develop skills in phonics, structural analysis, and vocabulary and to reinforce sight vocabulary; the interdependent roles of phonetic decoding and meaning; and the use of questioning strategies to assess different levels of comprehension. (GT)

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Comprehension: A Reasonable Goal At the Primary Level?

Joan M. Hahn
Reading Specialist
Lompoc Unified School District, Lompoc Ca.

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The term 'comprehension' often brings to mind formalized methods of questioning, question probes, literal or inferential thinking, sequencing, etc. The language, information and experiences brought to the printed page by each individual are frequently overlooked as essential ingredients in the development of comprehension at the primary level.

Strategies for the development of optimum comprehension during the beginning reading stages maintain an integration of the meaning within the reader (language, experiences, etc.) and the extraction of the meaning found within the written language (questioning, levels of thinking, etc.)

Components of these strategies include the oral language relationships to reading, the classroom climate contributing to reading, the skills related to beginning reading and effective questioning techniques of primary teachers.

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Oral Language Relationships to Reading Comprehension

In examining the sequence of early oral language development the progression of oral encoding appears to move from intent and meaning to phonological production (5). Speech seems to be perceived through meaning and syllables; not by analysis of segments. The sequence of oral language appears to be an analysis of meaningful units and then if necessary, analysis of the syllable into phonemes.

Gibson (5) compares the two processes on a broad scale as follows:

Speech Production	Written Language Comprehension
Babbling	Scribbling
Segmentation (pausing)	Segmentation (white space, letters)
Distinguishing features of phonemes	Distinguishing features of letters
Phonological rule system	Orthographic rule system
Intonation distinguishing speech from other acoustic units	Categorical features distinguishing writing from other visual inputs on paper

A translation of the written language into a childs' spoken language appears to be required for all children. (5). A child entering school may be ready to engage in the process of synthesis by analysis vs. analysis by synthesis. Successful reading acquisition may parallel oral language acquisition flowing from syllable analysis to observing similarities among syllables to phoneme analysis (4).

The fusing of oral language and written language in the child's environment permits the application of existing language skills to the task of learning to read.

Creating a Reading Climate to Experience Literature

Building common experiences through the enjoyment of literature with the entire group provides a basis for establishing

a strong bond between the realms of oral and written language. Written language, in the form of literature, poetry, songs, etc., may become alive and exciting by bringing them into the child's environment visibly through charts, posters and other visual displays. The auditory parallels of the literature may be made through reading and rereading favorites, choral reading, chants, songs, rondos, Reader's Theater, etc. The experiences with literature may be extended through the creation of story murals, flannel board stories, individual and class books, puppet presentations, and other activities that facilitate the concept of meaning being conveyed through written language. The interdependency of oral and written language (2) is utilized by providing opportunities for children to see and to hear the language they will read.

The reading climate of a classroom is enlarged with each new poem or literature selection read and enjoyed by the class or small group. These common experiences are unique and special to a particular classroom and provide excellent referants for concept development, comparison activities, comprehension activities and other reading-related activities. A teacher may continually draw from this experiential base in the development and extension of reading. These experiences belong only to the classroom that enjoyed the literature together and provide a mutuality and closeness for the group through literature.

Initial Reading Skill Relationships to the Reading Climate

The classroom experiences with literature provide a basis for presenting and developing skills that are often related or associated with the beginning reading process. These skills include perception, phonics, structural analysis, vocabulary building and sight vocabulary development.

Visual perception activities that revolve around written language strengthen a skill that carries over to the act of reading. As an example, after a poem has been read and enjoyed, sentence strips may be matched to a chart of the poem. This phrase or word matching activity permits the integration of oral

and written language with the area of perception.

Many poems lend themselves effeciently to the presentation and reinforcement of phonic skills. As an example, if the discrimination between beginning sounds were being emphasized, words beginning with those sounds may be selected from a poem and visually matched with words beginning with those sounds. An individual, partner or small group activity may evolve which will reinforce not only the concept of the beginning sounds, but also maintain the contextual base of the sound, the word and the phrase.

The different forms of the word 'rain' that appear in the poem Rain by Robert Louis Stevenson may be used to construct a structural analysis activity. Substitution of the word 'rain' with other words such as 'snow' or 'hail' will extend the structural concept of the endings. Words such as 'sun' or 'wind' will add another dimension to the concept. The poem may be rewritten with the transformations to use as additional reading selections.

A vocabulary bingo game reflecting the concepts in a verse such as the Mother Goose seasons verse provides a fun way for vocabulary development. Bingo boards may be constructed with the descriptive words under the name of each season. An additional word rhyming with the descriptive word and related to each of the seasons may be selected through discussion and extension of ideas from the verse.

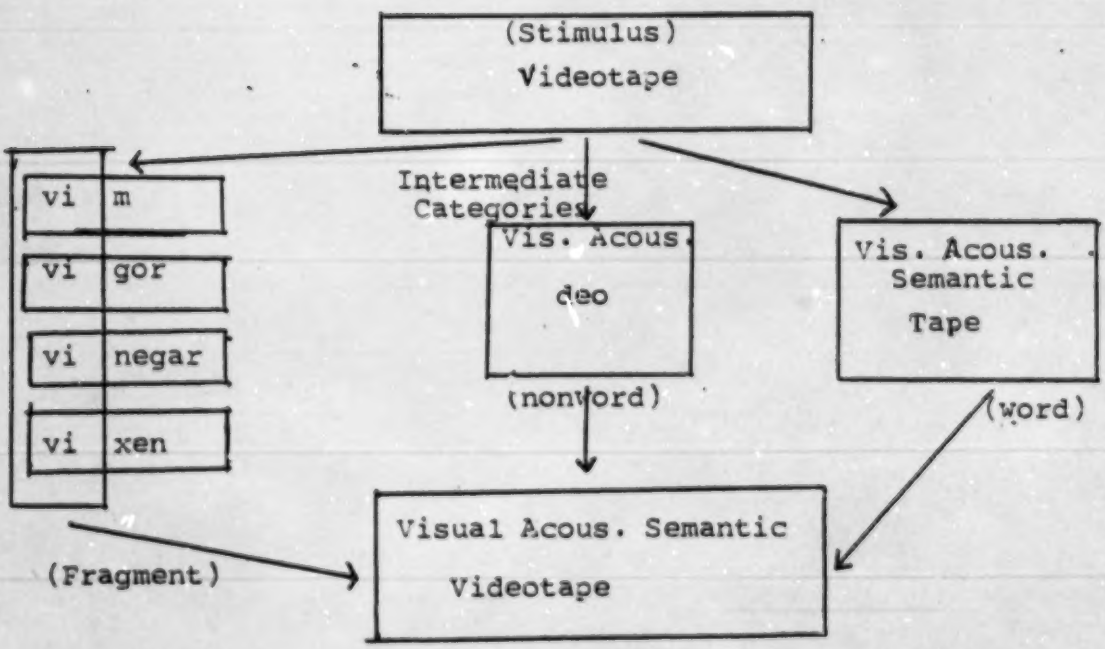
Sight vocabulary may be reinforced through word matching activities or concentration games using the words from a particular poem. A booklet entitled "I Know These Words" may reflect an individual child's collection of sight words learned from the poems and literature selections presented.

With these activities on-going in the classroom, it is important to remember that the major purpose of presenting the literature selections is for enjoyment and integration of oral and written language. One or two activities relating skills to the selections will not detract from the purpose. More than one or two activities may diminish the enjoyment of the selection.

The activities described follow the parallel outlined between oral and written language. The choice of activities and the skills to emphasize are dependent upon the needs of each beginning reader. These needs vary from student to student and within student at different times.

Frank Smith (7) describes the varying processes a reader may use to identify a word. Smith defines instant recognition of a word as an 'immediate' identification. Words which are not instantly recognized are 'mediated' through intermediate categories applying perception, phonics, structural analysis or vocabulary skills. The mediated word process, using the example of the word 'videotape' is shown graphically at the bottom of the page. The diagram shows that each category contains a visual, acoustic and semantic element and that the development of one element does not preclude the development of another. Meaning and comprehension may be developed simultaneously with the skills related to the beginning reading process.

Mediated Word Identification



The chasm between decoding and comprehension seemed to be widened by Chall in the late '60's (2:113). Recent research tends to narrow that gap and support the interdependant roles of phonetic decoding and meaning.

Perfetti(6:20) offers a formula for reading comprehension illustrating the interdependant roles of decoding and meaning: Cognitive part of reading comprehension = language comprehension+ decoding + x (x being a small relative to the other two factors.) He suggests that during the reading process, three levels of processing are occurring with rapid shifts among them. These levels include:

I. Verbative form
II. Completion of semantic analysis
III. Integration of semantic analysis

Level I is dependant upon memory, analysis of word meanings and syntactical operation; level II process involves the immediate meaning of the phrase being read, and level III involves the integration of what is being read to the past discourse.

Perfetti states, also that decoding is not independent of comprehension but decoding is not sufficient for comprehension.

A serious error is made when attention to decoding automatically assumes a decrease in attention to meaning. (2)

Applying Effective Questioning Strategies at the Primary Level

Teacher's ability to ask effective questions at the literal and inferential levels varies greatly and has a tremendous effect on the development of comprehension.(2) The skill of being able to ask meaningful questions 'on-the-spot' must be based upon a firm theoretical viewpoint.

A taxonomy which provides a guide for reaching the different levels of thinking is as follows:

Locating and remembering
Organizing
Predicting and extending
Evaluating (4)

A teacher may move up or down the taxonomy to meed the immediate needs of a student. Together with questioning, activities related to literature may be used to reinforce these comprehension levels.

Just as beginning readers exhibit a continual search for meaning, even attempting to make real words out of nonsense words, (2) teachers must continually require that each reading presentation flows from meaning of written language through possible skill development back to meaning. If comprehension and enjoyment of the literature presented are set forth as priorities, the oral language abilities, the reading climate established, the questioning and levels of thinking reached will influence the development of comprehension at the primary level in a positive way.

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